

**THE ECZEMAS : A SYMPOSIUM BY TEN AUTHORS.** Edited by L. J. A. Loewenthal, M.D., M.R.C.P., D.T.M. and H. (Pp. 267; figs. 77. 35s.)  
Edinburgh : E. & S. Livingstone, 1954.

THIS is a most interesting and at times exciting book which will be read and enjoyed by all those concerned in the management of eczema—but there are many faults. The editor has set himself an almost impossible task. He has attempted to unify the ideas on the subject of eczema as propounded with considerable vigour by nine authors (and himself), representing six different countries (England, Scotland, Switzerland, South Africa, United States of America, and Denmark). It is soon obvious to the reader that not only, as everyone knows, is there no international agreement on terminology, but there is little agreement on etiology or classification. Various editorial footnotes help to smooth out some of the rougher passages (for example, "The term 'allergic eczema' is to be taken as meaning 'allergic eczematous dermatitis' throughout this chapter: in chapter IV 'allergic eczema' is given as one of the synonyms of atopic dermatitis . . .").

To a professional dermatologist who, alas, has to have not only his own workable classification of the eczemas, but also a knowledge of the classifications employed by other authors, this defect is interesting and amusing, but it surely will be quite exasperating to others. But who was the book written for? In the last chapter we get a hint, ". . . a modicum of basic training has to be assumed." Why then are two pages devoted to a most elementary description of normal skin histology? Indeed, the whole chapter on histopathology is elementary and suitable for first hospital year students only. This contrasts strongly with the advanced experimental work described in detail in the subsequent chapter.

The reviewer was impressed by the forcefulness of the section on atopic dermatitis, but found the 1, 2, 3, 4, a, b, c, etc., method of presentation very difficult to read. Haxthausen's chapter on the theoretical considerations is fascinating and Bettley's chapter on contact eczema is full of practical advice. There is a little gem of summarising by Gordon on the involved subject of eczema of the hands, and the same author's differentiation of the types of eczema encountered in babies is noteworthy.

Throughout it all, the kindly pen of the editor fills in the gaps. The ". . . huge, hotly debated and uncertain problem" of nervous and emotional factors in the causation of eczema is presented in a way which appeals particularly to the reviewer when he writes: "Nevertheless, I believe that a psychosomatic explanation of ætiology, in the present state of our knowledge, must be subject to certain conditions: it should be the last factor considered, not the first; it should not be adduced simply through lack of a somatic explanation, that is by exclusion; and it should not be employed, in desperation, as an unconscious means of shifting the blame from our own inadequacy to the patient's temperament."

This book should certainly be studied by all qualified and potential dermatologists, and the very fact that it is written by people representative of six different countries offers a hope that soon international agreement on classification of the eczemas may be possible. If the ten dermatologists here could agree, maybe the rest of us would follow?

The book is well produced and bound. The type is clear, and there are few or no typographical errors. The illustrations are, for the most part, good.

J. M. B.

**HOSPITAL AT WORK.** Published for the Middlesex Hospital. (Pp. 48; illustrations 150. 3s. 6d.) London : Max Parrish, 1954.

TO-DAY the public manifest an interest which is probably not entirely healthy in hospitals and operations, and especially in the more spectacular aspects of medicine. When so many sources pander to their appetite, it is well that a great hospital should present its work in a manner likely to interest the public, and at the same time with a minimum of emotionalism. This beautifully produced book is characterised by the highest technical excellence of photography, by editing as clever as that of the best illustrated papers and by commendable restraint. It should achieve its declared object of promoting the confidence of the patient in those who are looking after him. It should interest every doctor, and it is likely that his patients will be even more interested.